

MAY 6, 1976

April rainfall reports vary from district to district. Some hombres have had well into the inches, others scant measurements that barely change the dust patterns.

In our neighborhood, showers and dews halted the feed wagons. Old cows remain in winter hair. An unexpected cold front would be bad for the new grass, but the livestock are still hard enough from the March scourge to continue on a minus maintenance schedule.

I don't like to see cattle heal too fast from a drouth. Rain stress hurts about as bad as the shock of dry weather. Many operators put too much value on range feed as it is. Natural forage defies controlled feeding. Cattle and sheep alike eat all they want of grass and weeds without the rancher being able to check the quality or the quantity.

Were it possible to cut and bale the grass to feed the animals from a pickup, much of the trouble would be eliminated. My paternal grandfather cut prairie hay way back there. However, in my times, the entire grass production of one decade in the Shortgrass Country wouldn't overload a homemade two wheel trailer.

Another disadvantage of rain is the treachery involved. I don't mean floods or erosion. I mean the way that herders are encouraged to keep on ranching. Two-tenths of an inch will cause a Shortgrasser to trample down his colleagues while tearing off to a cow sale. Drouth tempers a man's appetite for four-legged animals. Yearlings ewes or three year old cows lose a lot of their appeal after nine months of clear skies blighted by whirlwinds and dust storms.

The best trust that a lawyer could write for folks addicted to hollow horns and filling wool bags would be an instrument that restricted the beneficiaries from owning any beast that had a digestive system more extensive than a craw and opening for same any larger than a beak.

You've heard of the wrecks that the major vices have caused. Whiskey and women. Horses and cards. Fighting chickens and wheels and dice. But what you haven't heard is how much ruination has resulted from trafficking in livestock. Maybe you've heard it and just didn't think about it. I don't actually know what people think. You have to be in front of a microphone or on TV to do that.

Lots of predictions of man's downfall never do occur like he thinks they will. I remember old boys back in college who stayed broke financing the wax for their hair and their dancing shoes. Refreshment centers and dance halls took a major portion of their allowances. Co-eds competed with their interest in world history and the language so intensely that they thought King George II was the name of a cigar, and the construction of a sentence was a building project.

Yet those same fellows didn't end up on the wrong side of the lily pads. They ended up old and pious. Serious and wise. Forgetful and righteous. I don't have a way of checking on every one of them, but I'd bet that after they got out of college they lost more money and time on the stock market or the cow market than they ever did in the wild days of their youth.

Now don't go off saying that I've endorsed sin and damnation. I'm just saying that the list should be enlarged. We never are going to get even with the amount of grief cattle have extracted upon us. You and I know that the old cows are going to come back some day to refund our money. Nevertheless, the path to someday can be long.

Along the roadways, the flowers are blooming. Cattle bed down at noon. Pickups going through the pastures don't start stampedes for the sack goods. Spring has hit in most parts. We'd better be mighty thankful for the rain we received.